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The French Revolution

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Prior to the age of reason, people were under the umbrella of the Church, they all believed that war, poverty and injustice are the punishments from God and thus, men can do nothing but accept them and live their lives as the will of God. However, during the age of Enlightenment, numerous concepts of thought influenced humans' minds. One suggested that man could achieve anything he would like to provided that he was reasonable and such goal was genuine.¹ Additionally, the idea sparked the French's thought and the questions then rose: how long had they been suffer, whether it was god's will that made them pay taxes to the Church and the nobility or made them valueless relative to other classes of the society. Reinforced by the resentment of the ancient regime, the unmanageable debt and the scarcity of food, the French revolution eventually broke out.² French citizens continuously asked for "equality" and it is this "equality" that is believed to be the French Revolution's most important contribution to the mankind.

The aforementioned "equality" does not mean the justice or fairness in legal sense. It rather conveys the sense of natural rights which was frequently asserted during the Enlightenment. Consequently, equality, here, represents the possession of any rights that belong equally to all men and that can be taken away by no one. One of the most dominant thinkers at that time, John Locke, stated that human was born into a state of nature. That is human was innately rational, tolerant and happy; nevertheless, living in such way may offend

¹ "Modern Thought." *The Enlightenment*. 6 Jan. 2012. <http://faculty.uss.edu/egh-danerow/the_enlightenment.htm> Modern thought

² "France History - Causes of the French Revolution." *Bonjour La France*. 6 Jan. 2012 <<http://www.bonjour-lafrance.com/france-facts/france-history/causes-of-the-french-revolution.htm>>

others' liberty to live.³ Hence, social contact was established and eventually chained that man as Rousseau described.⁴

During the ancient regime, French society faced the rigid social structure. The society was divided into three estates: the clergy, the nobility and the third estate--everyone who was not a member of either the first or second estate. The third estate was, undoubtedly, the lowest hierarchy and the most populated class. Its main duty was to pay taxes to the king, to the church, to the lord of the manor as well as the indirect taxes on wine, bread and salt whereas their voices in the Estate General at that time were barely minded.⁵ This depicted that the government did not ensure all men's happiness and security.⁶ As Locke expressed about the limited rights of the rulers in the Two Treatises on Government that none had right to tax on any property of their citizens unless those people were consent.⁷ This means that even though social contact was framed the ruler cannot violate the persons' natural rights. Thus, the French revolution itself exhibited the mechanism that people used to foster the desire for equality, to preserve the inborn right equally owned among persons.

Moreover, what the citizens of France did in those days was considered the pursuing of retaining the Natural Rights. The people rose up, walked out of the Estate General and established their own assembly, the National Assembly, where every estate was equally held. On the ground of feeling that they had been treated unfairly under the Estate General, those men complied their intellectual right to be able to bear the habitual comfort and happiness

³ "Natural Rights." *The rights of the Colonists*. 6 Jan. 2012. <<http://history.hanover.edu/texts/adamss.html> Natural Rights>

⁴ "Human rights - Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains." *Expertscolumn Where Information Becomes Insight*. 6 Jan. 2012. <<http://expertscolumn.com/content/human-rights-man-born-free-everywhere-he-chains> >

⁵ "Origin of the French Revolution." *The History Guide*. 6 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.historyguide.org/intellect/lecture11a.html>>

⁶ "Natural Rights." *The rights of the Colonists*. 6 Jan. 2012. <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/adamss.html> Natural Rights>

⁷ Wikipedia Contributors. "Two Treatises of Government." *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*. 4 Jan. 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Treatises_of_Government>

which were believed to be innate and that cannot be restrained from.⁸ This obviously demonstrates how much the French valued their rights and how they contributed the concept of equality to mankind. Almost every step taken starting from the founding of the National Assembly, the oath at the tennis court, the storming of the Bastille up to the declaring of the Rights of Man and Citizen both reflected and promoted the retaining for equality in one's Natural Rights. Evidently, those actions were recorded and are nowadays the crucial subject required studying. As a consequence, what those men did in the past to house their equality are still currently apparent and widely broadcasted.

Indeed, the more concrete version of the sense of equality that the Revolution contributed to mankind seems to be the present world's value about human rights. Apparently, human rights are the rights that people have just because they are human beings namely the civil and political rights such as the right to life or the equality before the law and the economic, social and cultural rights like the right to get education and others.⁹ Even though the French Revolution does not have the casual relationship with such materials, what the French citizens did actually mark a massive development on the society's worldview's of the sense of equality. Since then, such concept has embodied even deeper and became more meaningful to mankind. Besides, the Universal Declaration of Human Right that all the members of the Unites Nation are required to consider as the standard to guide their human rights policies is another worth mentioning issue. The bill stated that all humans are born equal and that each possesses inalienable rights. In addition, Most of the articles assert to the right to life; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom to express opinion to rest and to own property.¹⁰ These substantial topics can be found in the Revolution especially in

⁸ "John Locke: natural rights to life, liberty and property." *Freeman Ideas on Liberty*. 6 Jan. 2012. <<http://thefreemanonline.org/features/john-locke-natural-to-life-liberty-and-property/>>

⁹ "What are human rights?." *United Nation Human Rights*. 6 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/pages/WhatAreHumanRights.aspx>>

¹⁰ "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *the United Nations*. 10 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>>

the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the citizen, August, 1789, of which the French established in order to assure their deserved rights.

Furthermore, the concern for women's right these days can well depict the sense of equality that the French Revolution enriched the society. The fact that women work more than men but earn less; become more educated but still lack of equality in employment, political and social relation or even the minor sexual harassment or an assault related to gender discrimination has attained highly notice portrays how sensitive and regarded the society is to women's right.¹¹ Nonetheless, before the Revolution, such idea gained very little attention even during the enlightenment when people appeared to be more reasonable. Most of the men at that time turned out to agree with Rousseau that women belong at home and therefore their duties were to play role in domestic chore not in public.¹² However, after the march to Versailles in October 1789 followed by the attending in various meeting political clubs, both men and women then agreed for the guarantee of women's rights. Likewise there was also the announcement to support the full political rights for women published on newspaper and others movement such as the campaign for women's in the period of the Revolution. These actions display how essential rights are to mankind which certainly included women. Not to mention the equality and opportunity in some other aspects for instance the opportunity to be equally treated by government, to freely participate in economic, social and political life and to acquire justice equality which are also rooted from the Revolution.¹³

In conclusion, the French Revolution has long furnished mankind with the sense of equality. It is the progress of how people perceive the "equality", starting from almost every

¹¹ "Women's Right." *Global issue*. 10 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.globalissues.org/article/166/womensrights#WomenWorkMoreThanMenButArePaidLess>>

¹² "Women and The Revolution." *Exploring the French Revolution*. 5 Jan. 2012. <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/chap5a.html>>

¹³ "Equality and Opportunity." *Open Society Foundations*. 10 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.soros.org/initiatives/usprograms/focus/equality/about>>

single event in the Revolution, passed through different generations and appeared in the present day that demonstrates how precious the thought of equality and the Revolution itself are. Through all actions taken by the French citizens, the illustration of bills and laws on human right and the essence of women's rights and other opportunities in the society, "equality" is no doubt the most substantial contribution to mankind.